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ABSTRACT

This document was developed to help adults and children use television in new and better ways. While this guide's special focus is on preteens (ages 9 to 12), it can be of use with both younger and older audiences. Sample open-ended questions are provided for the following issues: family and friends, values and emotions, trust and responsibility, relationships, and sexual roles and sexual behavior. Also included are specific tips on talking about sexuality using television programs as a conversation starter. Exercises are provided for combining television viewing with interactive activities. This includes watching commercials and looking for ads that use sex to sell and discussing whether it is necessary to the product. A fact sheet on media and adolescent sexuality is provided. The programs described in this guide are those from the 1991 fall season that have teenage characters and are likely to raise issues of sexuality and values. The guide presents a listing of production companies and other organizations to help locate more information and share thoughts with the creators of today's television programming. (LLL)

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TALKING WITH TV

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"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTE

Gena C. Brave

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOU INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

"Was her mother fair not to let her go out?"

"Maybe – but they should've talked it over more."

CG023993

Talking With TV

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Dear Staff of Beverly Hills 90210,

I never thought AIDS was something I needed to think about. January 3, 1991, after watching your show, I changed my mind. This episode touched me in a way no other program dealing with the subject has.

The story line and characters gradually pulled you in and made you feel at ease with the information. Too often the AIDS issue is forced and causes a negative reaction. This episode dealt and drew in the viewer with believable, real-life experiences. Definitely a show to re-air.

I've had minimal experience myself, yet these days, I realize now, **you can never be too sure or too safe.**

Thank you for making me and I hope many others more responsible.... Keep up the good work.

God Bless.
Dawn

Talking With TV

Television is a powerful communicator that shapes national and international politics, provokes social change and influences the thinking and purchasing habits of its viewers. In less than 50 years, television has become an omnipresent source of information about every aspect of human nature.

Television is everywhere – in our homes, our schools and our workplaces. We have organized our schedules, our personal interactions and even our furniture around television, giving it a place of prominence in our lives unmatched by any other medium. Our children spend more time tuned into TV than they spend at school or with their friends and family. In fact, they spend more time watching TV than doing anything else except sleeping!

Those of us who live with or work with young people cannot help but worry about the variety of messages children receive from TV. Researchers are just beginning to document what parents and youth-serving professionals already know instinctively: much of what children learn comes from television. TV provides a glimpse into the adult world that is especially compelling because it is entertaining.

But does TV influence children's attitudes toward sexuality? Research evidence indicates that it does and that there may even be a relationship between "sexy" TV and sexual behavior. Children and adolescents tend to rely on TV for sexual information to avoid the embarrassment of talking to their parents and peers about sexual issues. Adults, meanwhile, worry about the explosion of sexual content on television and its relationship to the consequences of adolescent sexuality, such as unintended pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.

"I believe we have a great responsibility to be truthful and informative and hopefully compelling at the same time." – James Eckhouse, who plays the father on ***Beverly Hills 90210***

More and more often, television programming offers children and adults positive educational and informational messages along with quality entertainment. But when the shows children watch distort or make light of sexuality, or fail to reflect personal and family values, parenting adults must find opportunities to temper those messages and increase young people's understanding. The consequences of children being misinformed are too great. Through proactive efforts by adults, TV can be used as an excellent resource for teaching children what they really need to know about the adult world. Young people of all ages are

intensely curious about sexuality and adults need to communicate better on the subject. TV can be made an ally in that educational effort.

The Center for Population Options (CPO) developed ***Talking With TV*** to help adults and children use television in new and better ways. While this guide's special focus is on pre-teens (ages 9 to 12), it can be of use with both younger and older audiences. The programs described in this guide are those from the 1991 fall season that have teen characters and are likely to raise issues of sexuality and values.

Talking With TV contains tips on how to use television in sexuality discussions with children through open-ended questions and activities designed to spark communication on specific topics. Also included is a listing of production companies and other organizations to help you locate more information and share your thoughts with the creators of today's television programming.

Parents and other adults can help determine what TV teaches their children about sex, and ***Talking With TV*** will show how it can be done. The time to start is now!

Making TV an Ally

Children learn about the mechanics of sex from a variety of sources but often rely on television for their information about sexual expression and values. Though even primetime television has become more revealing in its sexual depictions, programming tends to portray the more glamorous side of sex, largely ignoring its consequences.

It can be scary for adults to acknowledge the developing sexuality of children. But we must. Children are vulnerable to more than just the emotional power of sexually intimate relationships; the high rates of adolescent pregnancy and the growing threat of HIV/AIDS underscore the consequences of sexual irresponsibility. We want to protect our children from the consequences of risky behaviors, but as we search for ways to influence our children's values and choices we often find that our efforts are undermined by the entertainment media.

However, as the teen letter on page two illustrates, television does not have to be an adversary in our efforts to educate children -- it can be enlisted as an ally.

While shows that depict responsible, wise and thoughtful decisions about sex are still in the minority, even less ideal portrayals can offer positive learning experiences. And increasingly, we can find innovative shows that confront with unflinching honesty the many complex issues, including the sexual ones, that adolescents and preteens face.

Talking about Sexuality

Discussing every sexual message on TV would require extraordinary vigilance. But parents and other adults can translate selected messages into teachable moments suited to children's developmental levels. Here are a few pointers that can help turn TV into an excellent conversation starter:

- Look for shows, specific plots or scenes that address basic sexuality issues.
- Be aware of what shows children choose to watch with you and those they prefer to watch alone.
- Keep discussions informal and fun. Use commercial breaks to talk about the messages being presented on the show you are watching.
- Regularly ask open-ended questions (like "How do you feel about ...?" or "What do you think about ...?") or offer your observations. Even if you do not receive a thoughtful response you will be nurturing the critical

Asking the Right Questions

Understanding how television deals with sex and other sensitive issues is the first step in learning to use television as a springboard for discussion. Entertainment media thrives on contrast, conflict and exaggeration. Subtle sexual messages are sent every time a woman or man appears on the screen. When presenting provocative images, TV often uses innuendo and humor – methods that confuse young people – rather than direct and reasoned portrayals of human sexual expression.

By sifting through this array of presentations and discussing single elements within it, you can use television as an excellent teaching aid. But you have to **think** about what you are watching. Once you do, you will be able to assist children in looking beyond the straightforward messages about sex and exploring the more complicated issues inherent in every show.

"Our aim is not to provoke controversy but to explore crucial issues from several points of view." – the producers of A Different World

Indeed, turning your TV into a resource and a conversation starter can help you prepare pre-teens and teens for the transition into adulthood. Not only will it make you all more critical TV viewers, it will create open channels of communication that

Talking about Sexuality (Continued)

thinking skills that will help children question the implied messages delivered by the media.

- When watching TV with children, look, listen and then discuss your own thoughts. Express your opinions on the issues. Children need to know your bottom line before they can begin to form their own views.
- Avoid lecturing about negative messages. Children will quickly build barriers against constant criticism of programming they enjoy. Instead, transform the negative messages into positive moments of discussion by asking young people for their views of the situation.
- Be sensitive about who is present when starting serious conversations. Young people often feel embarrassed by discussions of sexuality in front of their friends or other adults.
- Direct questions often put kids on the spot while musing aloud and asking open-ended questions prompts conversation in a less threatening way.

can enrich your relationships. Children will gain knowledge and communication skills and you will have the chance to learn about their views and values while sharing your own in a meaningful and entertaining way. Look for these issues when watching television with young people and try posing a few of the following open-ended questions.

Family and Friends

- Would you like to be part of that family? Why or why not?
- Do the parents on this show communicate well with their kids? Do the parents know what their kids are doing or thinking?
- What do you think of the stars' friends? Would you like friends like that? Why or why not?
- Do you think the TV parents approve of their children's friends? If you were a parent, what would you do if your child had a friend you didn't trust?
- What makes a good friend?
- Can boys and girls, or men and women, be friends with each other without being romantically or sexually involved? What can happen to friendships when couples break up?
- Who has the most influence – their friends or their parents? What do you think about that?

Values and Emotions

- Do the characters on this show express their true emotions or do they hide them? What happens in either case? When do you choose to hide your emotions? Why?
- How do people express their feelings for each other in this show? How would you react if someone told you they were angry with you? Or that they liked you?
- Is school important to the kids on this show? What do you think about that?
- Do these kids have plans for the future? What are yours?

Trust and Responsibility

- Would you trust that person? Why or why not? What does it mean to trust someone? Have you ever felt you couldn't trust a friend with a secret? When do you share secrets? How do you pick someone to trust?
- Have you ever lost confidence in someone? What happened? How could you trust them again?
- What chores or responsibilities do the kids on this show seem to have? Would you give your kids more or fewer responsibilities? What do you think about the chores you have to do?
- How easy is it, really, to "just say no?" What do kids in your school think about that phrase?

Relationships

- What do you think of those characters' relationship? Would you want to be his or her girlfriend or boyfriend? What makes a good romantic relationship?
- How do people act when they like each other? Do boys and girls act differently? How do your friends act?
- What do you think of a girl asking a guy out? What advantages are there when a girl does the asking?
- How old should someone be before they go out with a date?
- Do you think kids feel they have to kiss on a first date? What about doing more than that? What kinds of pressures do you think kids your age feel about sex?
- Would you ever cancel plans with a friend if someone you really liked asked you out for the same time? How would you feel if your friend cancelled for the same reason?

Sexual Roles and Sexual Behavior

- Do you think these characters are ready for sex? Why or why not?
- What responsibilities go along with sex? How can you prevent an unwanted pregnancy or a sexually transmitted disease?
- Who is responsible for talking about the responsibilities of sex? Both partners or just one?
- Who do you think feels more pressure about sex? What do kids at school say about that?
- How could you communicate your feelings about wanting or not wanting a sexual relationship? Do you think teens or adults on TV do that well?
- What do you think about teenagers having babies? Would you want to be a teenage parent? Why or why not? What would you say if a friend of yours told you s/he wanted to have a baby to love?

Changing Channels

Combining television viewing with interactive activities is another way you can use TV's messages to initiate discussions of sexuality.

Try a couple of the following exercises.

- Watch a new show and then watch a rerun of a show from the 1960s or 1970s. Have young people discuss the differences in roles for men and women. Compare the fashions, decor, types of families and ways of living in the two shows. Explore the differences and try to discover what things have or have not changed.
- Watch several commercials with a critical eye. Ask the preteens how the advertisement sells the product. Look for ads that use sex to sell and discuss whether it is necessary to the product. Find out what kind of advertising influences them, their friends and family and why.
- Have teens select a moment or line from a show that expresses a feeling they have or have had. Ask how their reactions compare to those of the characters and if they handled the situation the same way.
- Have younger children write one letter to the producers of a show they liked and one to the producers of a show they did not. Review the letters and discuss what makes some shows better than others. If desired, send the letters on to the producers.
- Have everyone list values that are important to them. Have them look for examples of their values in their favorite shows. Explore which values are most and least important and which ones are more likely to be compromised.

The Facts

Center for Population Options

Media and Adolescent Sexuality

While television and movies that young people watch do not shy away from the topic of sexual relationships, their depictions are often unrealistic. Since many teens rely upon television for their information on sexuality and birth control, the results of such unrealistic portrayals can be devastating. A look at current research and statistics demonstrates the powerful role of television.

Teenagers Have Easy Access to Television

- Family ownership of television is nearly universal. One study found that on average, American families owned two or three color TV sets and one black and white set.[1]
- By the mid 1980's, nearly 50 percent of American homes were equipped with cable; one-third had at least one VCR.[2]
- Few parents impose rules or restrictions on content or when their adolescents watch TV.[3]
- By the time they graduate from high school, American teenagers will have spent 15,000 hours in front of the TV and only 11,000 hours in class.[4]

Sex Is a Considerable Part of Television Content

- In the 1987-1988 season, a typical American adolescent viewed nearly 14,000 instances of sexual material on television. Only 165 of the references referred to topics such as sex education, sexually transmitted disease, birth control, or abortion.[5]
- Results from a study in 1987 found that afternoon soap operas contained 35 instances of sexual content per hour, or more than one instance every two minutes.[6]
- In action and adventure shows, heterosexual sexual behavior is often associated with violence or a display of power and is rarely depicted in the context of a loving or committed relationship or as an expression of mutual affection.[7]

Television Content Can Have Negative Impact on Teen Perceptions, Behavior and Self-Esteem

- A study of almost 400 junior high students found that those who watched a greater amount of "sexy" TV were more likely than less frequent viewers to have become sexually active during the year prior to the survey.[8]
- Adolescents reported that television is equally or more encouraging about sex than either their best female or male friend.[9]
- Pregnant unmarried girls were twice as likely as never-pregnant girls to say that heterosexual relationships on television are similar to real-life relationships. These girls also were more likely to predict that their favorite TV character would not use birth control if involved in a premarital sexual relationship.[10]

[1]Bradley Greenberg, Ku and H. Li, "Young People and Their Orientation to the Mass Media: An International Study," Study #2: United States, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, June, 1989.

[2]Jane D. Brown, Kim Walsh Childers, Karl Bowman and Gary Koch, "The Influence of New Media and Family Structure on Young Adolescents' TV and Radio Use," *Communication Research*, 17:65-82, 1990.

[3]B.S. Greenberg, A. Soderman, C. Heeter, et al., "Descriptive Statistics for Project CAST Sample," Project Cast (Children and Sex on Television), Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI, 1984.

[4]V.C. Strasburger, "When Parents Ask About the Influence of TV on Their Kids," *Contemporary Pediatrics*, 1:18-30, 1985.

[5]L. Harris and Associates, *Sexual Material on American Network Television During the 1987-1988 Season*, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, New York, 1988.

[6]Ibid.

[7]J.N. Sprafkin and L.T. Silverman, "Update: Physical, Intimate and Sexual Behavior on Prime-time Television, 1978-1979," *Journal of Communication*, 31:34-40, 1980.

[8]S. Newcomer and J. Delano Brown, "Influences of Television and Peers on Adolescents' Sexual Behavior," paper presented at the 92nd annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August, 1984.

[9]Ibid.

[10]"Impact of TV on Adolescent Girls' Sexual Attitudes and Behavior," *TV Viewer*, 13:1-2, 1980.

What's On?

TV Shows with Preteen and Teen Appeal

The programs listed in this section are those from the 1991 fall season that CPO believes, based on ratings and focus groups, will be good discussion starters. CPO urges adults to exercise selection and judgement about which shows are appropriate for the young people they live or work with.

Any show whose title is followed by an asterisk is a past winner of a Nancy Susan Reynolds Award, presented by CPO for outstanding portrayal of sexual and family planning issues.

Brooklyn Bridge

Dinosaurs

NEW This Season

Brooklyn Bridge
CBS

This new half-hour comedy offers an engaging look at a multi-generational family living in Brooklyn in 1956. ***Brooklyn Bridge*** paints a portrait of time gone by, when people knew their neighbors and felt the city streets were safe. The series focuses on the small intra-family dilemmas of day-to-day life in the 1950s. The show highlights differences between the generations and will assist adults in discussions of the way things are today compared to "when I was your age."

UBU Productions in association with
Paramount Pictures
5555 Melrose Avenue
Wilder Building #215
Hollywood, CA 90038

Dinosaurs
ABC

This live-action series, originally created by Jim Henson, is set in 60 million B.C. The characters are dinosaurs, but their struggle with the transition to domestication is reminiscent of sit-com plots from the past four decades. The father dinosaur, a 43-year-old "blue collar" meglasaurus named Earl Sinclair, is a cross between Fred Flintstone and Ralph Cramden, although his allosaurus wife Fran is a bit more liberated than either Wilma or Alice.

Though the storylines play fast and loose with prehistoric details, the series provides a strange

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context for exploring "modern" family life. Technically this show is not new – four episodes aired prior to the start of the fall season. In the pilot episode "Baby" Sinclair hatches, Fran and Earl struggle over child-care duties and Earl is faced with the dilemma of following outdated tradition or behaving in a "civilized" manner. ***Dinosaurs*** is popular with 12- to 17-year-olds and even more popular with two to 11-year-olds. It's offbeat but it's funny, and the messages conveyed can provide excellent opportunities for parent-child value discussions.

Walt Disney Television
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521

The Royal Family
CBS

Alexander and Victoria Royal are an Atlanta mailman and his wife whose plan for a quiet and restful retirement are turned upside down when their daughter and her three children leave Philadelphia and move in. Parents and children watching this situation comedy can explore the theme of intergenerational conflict and consider what it means to be a "family." (The future of this show is a bit in doubt, however, because of the death of Redd Foxx, the show's star. Current plans include adding new characters.)

Eddie Murphy Television in association with Paramount Pictures
5555 Melrose Avenue
Wilder Building #215
Hollywood, CA 90038

Step by Step
ABC

This family sit-com features characters Frank Lambert and Carol Foster who return home from a whirlwind romance to share love, marriage and instant step-families – her three kids and his three kids. Frank is a divorced dad who's disorganized and laid back, and his children are just like him. Carol's a widowed mom who's well-mannered and neat, and her children are just like her. Much of the show necessarily revolves around this clash of lifestyles when the two families become one and parents have to come to terms with different philosophies of raising kids. The show offers viewers the opportunity to stress the importance of communication in relationships and that with time and patience things do work out – step by step, of course.

Lorimar Television
300 Lorimar Plaza, South
Burbank, CA 91505

The Royal Family

Teech
CBS

This new comedy features a young, black music teacher, laid off from Philadelphia's public schools, who finds a new position at an exclusive – and all white – private boarding school for boys. "Teech" Gibson arrives at Winthrop Academy hired to breathe new life into the creaky institution and to satisfy federal hiring requirements. Gibson immediately confronts the culture clashes central to the comedy of the show. This is an excellent vehicle for parents to use to open discussions about racism, classism and human relations in general.

Touchstone Television
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521

Teech

The Torkelsons
NBC

Set in Pyramid Corners, Oklahoma, ***The Torkelsons*** is a down-home sit-com about a big family living in a small town. The mother, Millicent, is a spunky, resourceful and creative woman who is struggling to raise five children on her own. Dealing with the growing pains of her eldest teen daughter, Dorothy Jane, often proves to be most challenging. Dorothy Jane, who views her family's hand-me-down lifestyle as embarrassing, often wishes for a new family. While light on serious issues, this show is big on dreams and heart, always finding the positive in a negative situation and proving that even without money life can still be quite an adventure.

Walt Disney Television
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521

The Torkelsons

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Beverly Hills 90210*
Fox

This series from Fox hit the airways by storm this past season. Set in glamorous Beverly Hills, this show hooked preteens and teens into the lives of its characters Brandon and Brenda, twins in senior high school, and their friends, including Dylan, Brenda's troubled boyfriend. The twins spent the past year adjusting to their new lives in Beverly Hills after moving from Minneapolis. The complications of the lives of teenagers – mainly those caused by love and romance – are the centerpiece for this very popular series.

"My parents and I often talk about Beverly Hills 90210. They think it is great that there's a show out there that is dealing with teenagers realistically and responsibly." – Jennie Garth, who plays Kelly on Beverly Hills 90210

The producers of this program have been very explicit in their depiction of teenage love and sex, but have injected a strong dose of reality in terms of presenting the consequences of the characters' decisions. During the past season, both Brandon and Brenda made their sexual debut but not without consideration of the risks involved with regard to possible changes in relationships, HIV infection and pregnancy. Storylines included discussions

with Brandon and his father about using condoms and discussions with Brenda and her father about his double standards for boys and girls. This season's premiere, aired over the summer, featured Brenda breaking up with Dylan because she decided the fear of pregnancy was too high a price to pay for a sexual relationship. Many of the episodes contain serious content, and probably for this reason they are appealing to their teenage audience. Unfortunately, these same attributes have brought the show under fire from groups who would prefer that teenage sexuality be ignored. Watching this show with young adolescents is strongly recommended because the frank discussions included in the various storylines may raise questions which parents want to answer and because the realistic portrayals offer parents the opportunity to discuss serious issues that they may not be able to initiate alone.

Lava Films
5700 Wilshire Boulevard, 5th Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Blossom

Blossom
NBC

Blossom Russo is a musically gifted 15-year-old girl tackling the turmoil of adolescence within an all-male household. Guiding her toward adulthood is her maternal grandfather, her father and two older brothers who are also confronting the issues of adolescence. When facing difficult decisions, in addition to her family, Blossom often turns to "Six," her best friend and confidante, for positive peer interaction.

This entertaining adolescent view of life presents parents and children with meaningful issues that are often encountered as young people mature. The show also is an excellent platform for discussions of substance abuse – one of Blossom's brothers is a recovering alcoholic and drug user.

Touchstone Television
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, CA 91521

The Cosby Show*
NBC

Over the past seven years, ***The Cosby Show's*** Huxtable family has grown and changed as families do. Rudy has grown from a kindergartner to a young adolescent; the older kids have moved out to go to college and some have moved back home. Some have become parents themselves. Last season saw the addition of Claire's niece, Pam. While a comedy, the show does not shy away from dealing with issues very relevant to the lives of teenagers – peer pressure, substance abuse and sexuality. The Huxtables serve as a role model of family communication and caring.

Carsey-Werner Productions
4024 Radford Avenue
Building 3
Studio City, CA 91604

A Different World*
NBC

A Different World began as a spin-off of ***The Cosby Show***. It is set on the campus of Hillman College and features a cast of characters who are predominately African-American college-aged youth. Storylines address the issue of race in a very

"Though love and sex are not issues we deal with every week, we do emphasize sexual and emotional responsibility." – the producers of ***A Different World***

straightforward way but do not preach or ignore its complexity. Episodes have focused on HIV/AIDS and responsible sexuality as love and romance play a very important role in the lives of these college students. (Whitley and Dwayne Wayne became engaged this year!) Almost every episode portrays a situation that could be used as an opportunity for parent-child discussions of sexuality.

Carsey-Werner Productions
4024 Radford Avenue
Building 3
Studio City, CA 91604

A Different World

Doogie Howser, M.D.

Doogie Howser, M.D.*
ABC

Doogie Howser is a child prodigy who graduated from Princeton at the age of 10 and finished medical school at 14. During the past two seasons Doogie has found himself growing up in a world where he has adult responsibilities in his professional life but he continues to live at home and hang out with teenagers his own age. During the past season he had to negotiate a romantic breakup because of his girlfriend's depression over the death of her mother, dating other girls and watching his friends finish high school and make plans for college. This season, Doogie loses his virginity and moves out on his own. Doogie's relationship with his parents continues to be generally ideal, although he does clash with them over questions of authority from time to time. The parents usually provide strong guidance for Doogie's complicated life and the show can help viewers explore the complexities of adolescence.

Stephen Bochco Productions
c/o 20th Century Fox Television
10201 W. Pico
Los Angeles, CA 90035

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Evening Shade
CBS

The storyline of this situation comedy centers around a high school coach in a small Arkansas town and his friends and family. Although it is not targeted for a pre-teen audience, it airs during an early evening time period so the material is appropriate for this age group. During the past season, the focus of one episode was the relationship between the coach's son and an older girl. Father, grandfather and son all discussed sexual debuts and presented an intergenerational approach to the need to think carefully about sexual relationships.

Mozark Productions
4000 Warner Boulevard
Burbank, CA 91522

Family Matters
ABC

This situation comedy – a spin-off of ***Perfect Strangers*** – is consistently popular with young adolescents. The show features parents Carl and Harriette Winslow; their teenage son and daughter and pre-teen daughter; Harriette's sister and her baby; Carl's mother; and the ever present neighbor, Steve Urkell. This show is very light and episodes are rarely issue-oriented though the relationships among family members still provide plenty of "teachable moments."

Lorimar Television
300 Lorimar Plaza, South
Burbank, CA 91505

Family Matters

Fresh Prince of Bel Air
NBC

The ***Fresh Prince*** continues to be a popular show among pre-teens and teens. Will Smith, the main character, has come to live in Bel Air with his rich aunt and uncle and three cousins. Much of the humor develops from the clash of his street and their society cultures. Episodes from the past season addressed racism, classism and prejudice, and almost every episode depicts Will trying to win the heart of a new young lady. Even though Will's methods are sometimes suspect, storylines generally give parents and children something to talk about.

Quincy Jones Productions
KTLA Studios
5842 Sunset Boulevard
Producers Building, Second Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90028

Full House
ABC

This family sit-com is about a widower who is raising his three daughters, ages four, eight and thirteen, with the help of his best friend Joey. His brother-in-law, Jesse, who also had lived in the house, is now married and has moved to an upstairs apartment with his expectant wife. The show is very popular with pre-teens and features storylines that deal with sexuality in its broader context of family life and romantic relationships.

Lorimar Television
300 Lorimar Plaza, South
Burbank, CA 91505

Parker Lewis Can't Lose
Fox

In high school, most adolescents want to be popular, charming and mischievous – as long as their luck holds. Parker Lewis is that teen and the guy everybody at school wants to be with and be like. With two sidekicks, Mickey and Jerry, Parker overcomes a variety of obstacles including traps set by his jealous sister and the brooding principal, Ms. Musso. While Parker always seems to have a plan for every situation, his escapades can help parents and young people explore values, relationships and teen pranks.

Fox Broadcasting Company
P.O. Box 900
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

Parker Lewis Can't Lose

Roseanne*
ABC

Three kids – two of them teenagers – a mother and a father live together in a working class household where there is conflict, but there is also love and honest communication. Life isn't always easy, but the Conners have a strong relationship with which to weather the storms. Past episodes have dealt with dating, drinking, parental authority and relationships between teens and their parents. This year's premiere featured a frank exploration of sexual responsibility when Becky chooses to engage in sex with her boyfriend.

Carsey-Werner Productions
4024 Radford Avenue, Building 3
Studio City, CA 91604

"If nothing else, we hope teens learn sexual responsibility from our show." – the producers of ***Roseanne***

The Simpsons
Fox

The Simpsons continues to be popular among the preteen crowd despite its competitive time slot. Bart Simpson is not a positive pre-adolescent role model and Homer the father often makes real-life parents cringe, but generally the episodes end on a note of family caring and enhanced communication. The show is not generally issue-oriented but there are many teachable moments in spite of the creator's desire to just have fun.

Gracie Films
c/o 20th Century Fox Television
10201 W. Pico
Los Angeles, CA 90035

The Simpsons

True Colors
Fox

Now entering its second season, ***True Colors*** continues its successful format featuring the Freeman family grappling with a houseful of teenagers from previous marriages. Adding to the commotion is a live-in mother-in-law who doesn't always approve of her daughter's interracial marriage. ***True Colors*** can perhaps be best described as the ***Brady Bunch*** of the 1990s. This comedy is an excellent conversation starter, offering opportunities to discuss racial and multigenerational issues.

Fox Broadcasting Company
P.O. Box 900
Beverly Hills, CA 90213

The Wonder Years*
ABC

Kevin and his friends begin high school this season. His friend Paul will be attending a private school, and Winnie, formerly the girl next door, will continue going to a different school. No doubt Kevin will continue to face the challenges of growing up in the early '70s.

During the past season, Kevin spent most of his time thinking about Winnie and romance will continue to play a major role in the new episodes. New developments in relationships between Kevin's father, sister and grandfather will continue to concern Kevin.

The adult voice-over often explores some of the subtleties of relationships and maturation and helps preteens and adults alike realize the complexities of interpersonal communication. Because the show features life in an earlier decade, it also assists parents in demonstrating how society and they themselves have developed and changed.

New World Television
1440 S. Sepulveda Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90025

Nickelodeon/Nick At Nite

Nickelodeon, owned and operated by MTV Networks, was created to provide programming especially for children and adolescents. Nickelodeon's primetime programming, called ***Nick At Nite***, features timeless sit-coms such as *Mr. Ed, The Patty Duke Show, The Donna Reed Show* and *Petticoat Junction* – all designed to appeal to adults and children.

Daytime programming includes kids' game shows like *Double Dare, Finders Keepers* and *Make the Grade* where young contestants engage in strange and gooey activities. Other shows like *You Can't Do That on Television* and *Out of Control* are all comedies reminiscent of *Laugh In* and other shows from past decades.

Two daytime series popular with the pre-teen crowd are *Hey Dude* and *Fifteen*. *Hey Dude*, which airs every weekday, finds four teenagers, Brad (female), Melody, Danny and Ted, working on a dude ranch in Arizona. They work for Mr. Ernst, the tenderfoot owner of the ranch. The stories typically involve conflicts among the four teens, the trouble they get into, the problems they solve and the fun they have on the ranch. All of this happens in an atmosphere of self-reliance and mutual dependence. And of course, the teens often face questions related to love and romance, although sex is not dealt with directly.

Fifteen is a weekly soap opera for preteens that explores adolescent dilemmas like romance, friendship and betrayal, as well as larger issues like discrimination, ecology, substance abuse and divorce. Each character faces a personal dilemma: Courtney deals with her parents' divorce; Brooke plots against Ashley because she believes her to be too perfect; Matt faces his drinking problem; Jeff suffers from unrequited love, and Kelley realizes that gossiping can cause a lot of trouble.

Preteens enjoyed the show last season and got hooked into the continuing nature of the episodes. Storylines provide parents and children opportunities to discuss friendship, peer pressure, dating and romance.

Afternoon Specials

ABC Afterschool Specials*

ABC Afterschool Specials are a series of special dramas produced for youth that specifically focus on matters of ethics and values as seen through the lives of the featured teenaged characters.

Four new ***ABC Afterschool Specials*** will be aired this season. The season premiere, *In the Shadow of Love: A Teen AIDS Story*, brings the central character face to face with the issue of HIV/AIDS as she finds that AIDS is striking teens who are not gay or IV drug users and as she discovers that even those close to her may not be immune. The other new specials will be part of a first-ever Afterschool miniseries, entitled *The Mall*, which follows an ensemble of seven characters over a summer. The first two of these focus on family relationships, while the third story's themes are substance abuse and sexuality.

Six previous specials will be repeated this season. Included among these are *Don't Touch* (sexual abuse), *A Question about Sex* (sexual decision-making) and *Testing Dirty* (random drug testing).

Various production companies. Contact ABC directly with viewer comments.

Schoolbreak Specials* CBS

These dramatic specials are produced for young people and focus on many important issues of concern to teens. Of note is *Dedicated to the One I Love*, the story of a young woman who must come to terms with the possibility that she is HIV-positive. Amy has just begun to cope with the accidental death of her boyfriend when she learns he had HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Her brief sexual relationship with the young man leaves her fearful that she might also have HIV. This special explores how Amy faces her fears and what she does about them.

Various production companies. Contact CBS directly with viewer comments.

Talking TO TV: Making Your Views Heard

This guide is designed to help you and your children talk **with** TV – to use television as a conversation starter and a resource for addressing difficult but critically important issues of sexuality.

Talking to TV is also important. When you have a compliment, complaint, question or a criticism, go to the source. Letting networks and show producers, as well as advocacy groups and others, know what you think about television shows tells them you are paying attention and gives them the valuable feedback they need to improve programming.

So write, and write often, and encourage your children to do the same. Discuss what you don't like, but be sure to let people know what you do like. If you think a show's producer has bungled an issue, let the company know specifically how. If there's a program or an episode that was right on target, tell the writers and producers you want to see more shows like that one, and let the network know that, too. The positive approach often is more effective in getting your ideas heard. Letters that are an unrelieved string of complaints may be personally satisfying, but will probably have less impact in the long run.

With each program description in this guide (pp. 11–22), we have included the name and address of the company responsible for producing it. The addresses of the networks that air them and other organizations concerned with television and young people are listed below. Your letters to producers, networks and other organizations will be welcomed – and noticed.

Networks

ABC
2040 Avenue of the Stars
Los Angeles, CA 90067

CBS
7800 Beverly Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90036

Fox
10201 W. Pico Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90035

HBO
1100 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10036

NBC
3000 Alameda Avenue
Burbank, CA 91523

Nickelodeon
1515 Broadway
21st Floor
New York, NY 10036

PBS
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Organizations Concerned with TV

Action for Children's Television
20 University Road
Cambridge, MA 02138
(617) 876-6620

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4400

Children's Television Workshop
One Lincoln Plaza
New York, NY 10023
(212) 595-3456

Education Training Research (ETR) Associates
1700 Mission Street
Suite 203
Santa Cruz, CA 95061
(408) 438-4060

Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 632-7000

National Association of Broadcasters
1771 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 429-5300

National Council for Families and Television
3801 Barham Boulevard, Ste. 300
Los Angeles, CA 90068
(213) 876-5959

National Education Association
1201 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 833-4000

Planned Parenthood Federation of America
810 7th Avenue
New York, NY 10014
(212) 541-7800

TV Guide
4 Radnor Corporate Center
Radnor, PA 19088
(215) 293-8500

U.S. Department of Education Public Affairs
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202
(202) 401-1576

The Center for Population Options

The Center for Population Options (CPO) is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for adolescents and assuring their successful transition to adulthood by preventing risk-taking behaviors and too-early childbearing.

CPO's national and international programs seek to improve decision-making through life planning and sexuality education programs, promote access to comprehensive health care, including family planning, through school youth centers and work to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, among adolescents.

CPO's Los Angeles-based Media Project serves as an informational clearinghouse for the entertainment industry. The Media Project encourages and supports positive and relevant messages about family planning, sexuality and reproductive health. The project includes the Media Advisory Service, which offers the news and entertainment industry research, information and script consultations; the Informational Series, which brings together experts, writers and young people for discussions; and the Nancy Susan Reynolds Media Awards program, which celebrates media professionals who present the complex issues surrounding sexuality with courage, determination and creativity.

The Center for Population Options
1025 Vermont Avenue, NW
Suite 210
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 347-5700
Fax: (202) 347-2263

Media Project/CPO
12023 1/2 Ventura Boulevard
Suite 2
Studio City, CA 91604
(818) 766-4200
Fax: (818) 766-3561

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